

# Sexual Violence and the Ukraine Conflict

April 2022



Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began on 24 February, allegations have been made that Russian soldiers sexually assaulted women. On 4th March 2022, Ukraine's Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba, spoke of [multiple cases of sexual violence in Ukrainian cities](#) which have been occupied.

Following this, four Ukrainian MPs who visited the U.K Parliament, reported that Russian soldiers were [deliberately targeting women and children](#) after Ukraine did not surrender. They reported women, including senior citizens, being gang-raped and in some instances killed. Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister, Olha Stefanishyna has also accused [Russian soldiers of raping Ukrainian women for hours and then killing them](#).

There have been multiple reports of Russian soldiers breaking down the doors of cellars and basement where people were sheltering and raping women. Some women were raped in front of their children and there have been allegations of these violent attacks [being filmed and put on porn sites](#) by Russian soldiers. Reports of soldiers carrying drugs, Viagra, and multiple packets of condoms have also come to light, raising questions on whether these items were purchased privately or had been supplied.

Due to ongoing hostilities and because many occupied towns and cities have been isolated with most telecommunications down, it has been difficult to independently verify these claims and for reports of sexual violence and further atrocities against civilians to come to light. Reports of sexual violence have been made by civilians who have managed to flee and by survivors from recently liberated areas. Others, have been reported on social media or have emerged after the [Ukrainian Security Service \(SSU\)](#) intercepted conversations between Russian soldiers and relatives or friends in Russia where they have [bragged about incidents of rape](#).

**It is likely that more reported incidents of sexual violence will emerge in the coming weeks.**

## Rape As A Weapon of War

[United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820](#) declared that "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide." Under international humanitarian law, the use of sexual violence is prohibited. Additionally, crimes of sexual violence may be charged as war crimes and crimes against humanity and/or genocide. In the past, the case law of international criminal tribunals have [prosecuted rape](#) and other serious form of sexual violence as grave breaches under Article 2 of the International Criminal Tribunal of the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) Statute. Rape and other forms of sexual violence can also be qualified as war crimes in the context of international armed conflicts without necessarily being grave breaches. International criminal law provides for individual criminal responsibility.

Further detailed investigation is required to ascertain to what extent sexual violence has been a systematic element in attacks on civilians or individual crimes committed by soldiers. There are clear indications that civilians are being targeted as part of the war strategy and there is mounting evidence that sexual violence is a distinct element in torturing civilians. Following the liberations of several towns and cities in Kyiv Oblast, it has become clear that civilians have been targeted and killed on a large scale. Russia has been previously accused of carrying out conflict-related sexual violence in the [context of arbitrary arrests or illegal detention](#) in eastern Ukraine since 2014 and [in Chechnya](#).

# Rape As A Form Of Socialisation Between Fighters

**Research** has shown that some armed groups have used sexual violence as an informal mechanism that strengthens commitment between fighters. Some armed groups may reportedly use sexual violence as a form of socialisation and social control within the group to strengthen loyalty and cohesion. **Since the start of the Russian invasion**, stories have circulated of Russian soldiers deserting their posts, having poor morale and lacking internal unity. Russian soldiers have been **reported** as being unmotivated to fight and confused about their mission in Ukraine.



## Reported Incidents in Ukraine: 24 February - 04 April 2022

### Donetsk Oblast

Mariupol has been under attack from Russian artillery since 24 February and has been fully surrounded by Russian forces since 2 March. Over **100,000** civilians have been unable to safely evacuate the town. Communication with residents remaining in Mariupol is difficult and there is for the moment only sporadic information. Additionally, there have been reports of civilians - mainly women and children - being forcibly relocated to Russian towns. It is unclear as to how these women and children are being treated.

**As reported on 28 March 2022:** In Mariupol city and raion, Donetsk Oblast, a woman was found dead in a basement of a school. She was found naked with a swastika painted on her stomach. A Ukrainian MP said Russian forces had raped and murdered her among other women and girls in the area. **Sources:** [India Today](#) and [Facebook](#)

**As reported on 30 March 2022:** In Mariupol city, Donetsk Oblast, a woman was raped multiple times in front of her son and killed by Russian soldiers. **Sources:** [Niezalezna](#) and [Polskie Radio](#)

**As reported on 03 April 2022:** In Mariupol city, Donetsk Oblast, a woman was raped and killed by an unspecified number of Russian soldiers. **Source:** [The Times UK](#)

### Kharkiv Oblast

Kharkiv has been the site of heavy fighting between Russian and Ukraine forces since the start of the Russian invasion and continues to be one of the front lines of the war. As a result, there is currently limited evidence available from Kharkiv.

**13 March 2022:** In Malaya Rohan village, Kharkiv Oblast, a 31-year-old woman was raped multiple times at gunpoint by a 20-year-old Russian soldier after he entered the school she and her family were sheltering in along with around 40 other IDPs, mostly women and girls. The soldier beat her and cut her face, neck and hair with a knife. **Sources:** [Human Rights Watch](#) and [24News](#)

### Kherson Oblast

Kherson city was the first major Ukrainian city to fall under Russian occupation and civilians organised demonstrations. Reports of sexual violence began to emerge almost immediately and sexual violence may also have been used against those protesting the Russian occupation

**As reported on 03 March 2022:** In Kherson city, Kherson Oblast, according to a doctor working in the city, 11 women have allegedly been raped by Russian forces after they occupied the city on 01 March. Local residents have reportedly advised women and girls in the city to not leave their homes. **Source:** [Rubryka](#)

**As reported on 04 March 2022:** In Kherson city, Kherson Oblast, a 17-year-old girl was allegedly raped and killed by Russian forces after they occupied the city on 01 March. This incident was reported by a local woman living in the city during a broadcast with CNN. **Source:** [CNN](#)

**04 March 2022:** In Kherson city, a 40-year-old woman and her 17-year-old daughter were raped by Russian soldiers. The woman and her daughter reported attending rallies against the Russian occupation of the city where they encountered psychological and physical abuse from the Russian soldiers. **Source:** [Deutsche Welle](#)

**UN Security Council Resolution 1325: To protect women and girls from sexual violence in conflict. Passed in 2000 after being voted by every member country of the UN, including Russia.**

As towns and villages remain occupied, only limited evidence reaches the outside world. Witness accounts have given an indication of what might be taking place in occupied cities and towns, however many of these occupied towns and villages remain cut off from the outside world with most telecommunications cut off. However, indications of what happened in Bucha and Irpin raises concerns for the safety of women and girls in other Russian occupied towns. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has already claimed that other towns might have even higher civilian death tolls than Bucha. Limited evidence currently available from Mariupol also suggests concerning levels of sexual brutality. It is essential that survivors are given an anonymous and safe platform to report these brutal attacks. Should you have further information about these incidents please [contact us](#). Insecurity Insight has also developed an independent [online platform](#) to aid in the reporting and monitoring of incidents of sexual violence occurring during the Ukrainian war.

## **Kyiv Oblast**

**The invasion started with Russian troops advancing towards the capital Kyiv. Ukrainian resistance stopped the invasion in towns and villages in the North of Kyiv in fierce battles. Many civilians remained trapped in their homes. Since the beginning of the conflict there were already reports of sexual violence by Russian soldiers after they occupied villages and towns in the region. Whilst under occupation, these areas were cut off from communication. After the withdrawal of Russian forces, multiple incidents of grave violence against civilians have emerged and multiple reports of sexual violence that occurred during the Russian occupation continue to emerge.**

On 17th March 2022, four Ukrainian MPs accused Russian soldiers of raping Ukrainian women, most of whom were above 60-years-old, and hanging them. Other women reportedly took their own lives following the sexual assault. These incidents were reported to have taken place around the vicinities of Kyiv, Bucha and Irpin. **Source:** [The Independent](#)

### ***Bucha Raion***

**As reported on 21 March 2022:** In Irpin city, Bucha Raion, Kyiv Oblast, Russian soldiers have been accused of raping women whilst occupying the city. These attacks occurred after Russian soldiers entered homes or opened cellars or basements where civilians sheltered. **Sources:** [EuroMaiden](#), [ITV News](#), and [Sky News](#)

**As reported on 29 March 2022:** In Vorzel town, Bucha raion, Kyiv Oblast, a 15-year-old girl was raped and held hostage for 10 days by Russian soldiers. The attack was allegedly filmed by the soldiers on a mobile phone. **Source:** [ITV News](#)

**As reported on 30 March 2022:** In Irpin city, Bucha Raion, Kyiv Oblast, an unspecified number of female and male civilians hiding in a basement were forced to undress and then beaten by Russian soldiers. **Source:** [ITV news](#)

**As reported on 03 April 2022:** In Bucha city, Bucha Raion, Kyiv Oblast, an unspecified number of women were found killed and raped allegedly by Russian soldiers who were occupying the town. The women's bodies were found burned. **Source:** [Express](#)

**As reported on 03 April 2022:** On a highway 20km outside Kyiv city, Bucha Raion, Kyiv Oblast, the bodies of three women were found naked and partially burned. **Source:** [The Guardian](#)

**As reported on 04 April 2022:** In Irpin town, Kyiv Oblast, a 15-year-old girl and her mother were raped by an unspecified number of soldiers. This incident was reported by a Ukrainian refugee who had recently fled the city. **Source:** [The Daily Mail](#)

**As reported on 05 April 2022:** In Irpin town, Bucha raion, Kyiv Oblast, two children under the age of 10 were reportedly found dead with signs of rape and torture. This incident was reported by Liudmyla Denisova, Ombudsman for Human Rights in Ukraine. **Source:** [Facebook](#)

### ***Brovary Raion***

**09 March 2022:** Near Shevchenkove village, Brovary Raion, Kyiv Oblast, a 33-year-old woman was repeatedly raped at gunpoint inside her home by two Russian soldiers. Her husband had been shot and killed earlier and her four-year-old child was threatened. One of the soldiers, Mikhail Romanov - a commander, has been identified and a warrant for his arrest has been issued. The other soldier has not yet been identified but according to the woman was in his twenties. The commander has also been accused of multiple rapes. **Sources:** [Daily Mail](#), [Facebook](#), [The New York Times](#) and [Wprost](#)

**As reported on 04 April 2022:** In Bovary city, Kyiv Oblast, an unspecified number of women were dragged out of their shelters and raped by Russian soldiers who were reportedly drunk. The soldiers also looted and beat residents. This incident was reported by a Ukrainian woman who had recently fled the city. The woman also reported that some of the women who had been raped were then found hanged. It is unclear whether they were killed or whether they committed suicide. **Source:** [The Daily Mail](#)

### ***Unspecified towns***

**As reported on 31 March 2022:** In an unspecified location, Kyiv Oblast, a woman was raped at gunpoint by three Russian soldiers in front of her three-year-old son. The city where the incident took place was not officially recognised as a territory not controlled by Ukraine, but the Russian military conducted active hostilities there. **Source:** [Deutsche Welle](#)

**As reported on 31 March 2022:** In an unspecified city, Kyiv Oblast, three women were raped in front of their children by Russian soldiers. One of the women's husbands was shot and killed. The city where the incident took place was not officially recognised as a territory not controlled by Ukraine, but the Russian military conducted active hostilities there. **Source:** [Deutsche Welle](#)

## **Mykolaiv Oblast**

**Mykolaiv Oblast has been subject to air and artillery assaults for multiple weeks as Russian troops attempted to advance towards Odessa.**

**As reported on 04 April 2022:** In Mykolayiv city, Mykolaiv Oblast, a three-year-old girl was found dead with signs of rape. This was reported by the Ukrainian Ambassador to Estonia. **Source:** [Twitter](#)

## **Vinnitsia Oblast**

**On 6 March an airstrike destroyed the airport in Vinnitsia.**

**As reported on 03 April 2022:** In Vinnitsia town and Oblast, a teacher was sexually assaulted by a member of the Ukrainian territorial defence services who dragged her into the school library and tried to rape her. The man has been arrested. **Source:** [The Guardian](#)

## **Unspecified Locations**

**As reported on 30 March 2022:** In an unspecified location, a 16-year-old girl was abducted and raped by three Russian soldiers who were part of a tank unit. This incident was reported by the Ukrainian Security Service (SSU) who intercepted a phone call between a Russian soldier and a woman in Russia. **Sources:** [Niezalezna II](#) and [The Sun](#)

## Sexual Violence Against Ukrainian Refugees

Since the start of the war, more than 4 million refugees have fled Ukraine. Refugees have fled into neighbouring Poland, Romania, the Republic of Moldova, Hungary, Slovakia, Belarus and the Russian Federation and some subsequently travelled further to other European countries. The majority of refugees fleeing are women and children.

Across Europe various initiatives have been set up to help Ukrainian refugees find shelter, however there have been reports of these initiatives being used by a [disproportionate amount of men as a dating site](#) who were applying to take in Ukrainian women if they were “beautiful, intelligent and well-groomed”. In the UK it was reported that Ukrainian female refugees looking for shelter were [sent explicit photos from men](#) who were exploiting the Homes for Ukraine programme.

There have also been concerns over traffickers targeting refugees. In Poland, a [man was questioned by the police](#) after he raised suspicions for offering help only to women and children, whilst another man was overheard promising work and a room to a 16-year-old girl before authorities intervened.

[Police in Berlin have warned women](#) and children against accepting offers of overnight stays, after receiving complaints from volunteers working with refugees arriving in Berlin’s central station of men approaching women with offers of a ride or a place to stay. Prior to the war, trafficking rings were active in Ukraine and neighbouring countries and the war can be used as a cover to increase business. Refugees need to be protected from sexual violence and exploitation.

### Germany

**06 March 2022:** In Duesseldorf city and region, North Rhine-Westphalia state, an 18-year-old Ukrainian female Ukrainian refugee was raped by a 37-year-old Iraqi man and a 26-year-old Nigerian man, both holders of Ukrainian citizenship, inside a hotel ship that is was being used to accommodate refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. **Sources:** [Polsat News](#), [Sahara Reporters](#) and [The Independent](#)

**Around 18 March 2022:** In Herne, North Rhine-Westphalia, a 25-year-old female Ukrainian refugee was raped by a 43-year-old man who offered her shelter in his apartment. The man has been arrested and has been in custody since 18 March 2022. **Source:** [Wiadomosci](#)

### Poland

**As reported on 12 March 2022:** In Wroclaw, a 19-year-old female Ukrainian refugee was raped by a man who had offered to help and shelter her after fleeing Ukraine. The man has been arrested by Polish police. **Sources:** [France 24](#), [Newsweek](#), [Polsat News](#) and [The Sun](#)

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